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TAGS: [PBTS](#) [UNSC](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [RU](#) [SR](#)

SUBJECT: LAVROV'S VISIT TO BELGRADE SHOWCASES HARDENING STANCE

REF: MOSCOW 1796

¶1. (u) Russian FM Lavrov's visit was widely covered in local press, which focused on his meetings with Tadic and Kostunica. His statements to press following the meetings reiterated Russia's commitment to continued negotiations and respect for implementation of UNSCR 1244 - the provisions of which he said had been completely unfulfilled. He insisted that an imposed solution for Kosovo is absolutely unacceptable, commenting that this was not the first time the U.S. had had "its own view" on an issue. Lavrov said after his meeting with Kostunica, and later in an interview with state television, that Ahtisaari's plan has collapsed, as it did not take into consideration the interests of one of the parties, adding that Russia has prepared constructive initiatives in response to the plan that could lead to a resumption on talks on Kosovo and the devising of a solution acceptable to Belgrade and Pristina. He added that it was "blackmail" to advance arguments in favor of accelerating a Kosovo decision lest security be jeopardized and a new wave of violence precipitated, noting pointedly that KFOR was well-equipped to handle outbreaks of violence, and that if it did not, any resulting violence would be solely KFOR's fault.

¶2. (u) Kostunica repeated the "blackmail" argument in public remarks with Lavrov after their meeting, adding that the UNSC would not abandon principles that it had been guided by in adopting 1244 in ¶1999. Kostunica claimed that the UNSC would respect its fundamental document which guarantees the principles of state sovereignty and territorial integrity and from which Serbia could not be exempted. President Tadic said following his meeting with the Russian FM that Serbia is prepared to take on its share of responsibility for stability in the Balkans, and expects legally correct treatment on the Kosovo issue in the UNSC. After meeting with Lavrov, he said that the UNSC mission should also visit the Serb enclaves to enable the mission to assess the implementation of res. 1244.

¶3. (C) Advisors to Tadic and Kostunica made themselves unavailable for additional readouts from the meetings. Russian Ambassador to Serbia Aleksander Alexeev, meanwhile, told the Ambassador Tadic and Kostunica had portrayed identical positions in every regard during their meetings with Lavrov. The Kostunica meeting, he said, focused more heavily on planning for the upcoming Security Council visit to Belgrade and Pristina, which Alexeev said would have to include a healthy dose of visits to Serb enclaves to allow UNSC Permreps to get a "full picture" of the situation on the ground. He said partition was not raised, and Russia did not intend to explore it unless and until the GoS formally proposed it. He also noted that the delegation had been struck by the strength, in particular, of Kostunica's conviction to stay the course of current Serbian policy.

¶4. (c) Alexeev assured the Ambassador that Lavrov did not promise a veto to either Tadic or Kostunica. In fact, he said Lavrov made it clear that Russia would take a "wait and see" attitude towards

developments in the UNSC, and would be willing to work with the Council on a resolution that accorded to international legal principles. In particular, Alexeev said Russia would be ready to discuss specific status-neutral issues including decentralization, protection of patrimonial sites, returns, freedom of movement, and security. He said Russia wanted to work with the U.S. and EU constructively on a resolution that would be palatable to both sides.

Alexeev said inclusion of language on Kosovo as a precedent was not necessary, perhaps even unwelcome, since such language would be counter to objective reality - separatist groups elsewhere in the world would see Kosovo as a precedent for using threats of violence to gain political ends no matter how the UNSC chose to characterize it. Later, speaking in a strictly personal capacity, Alexeev floated the concept of a resolution that enumerated restrictions to Kosovar sovereignty, to include armed forces (e.g., no force deployable outside Kosovo under a Kosovar flag), foreign policy, and a seat in the UN.

15. (u) Serbian wire service Tanjug reported April 20 that after Lavrov's declaration that Ahtisaari's plan has collapsed, the U.S. announced a continuation of "serious consultations" with Russian top level representatives. Quoting a "U.S. State Department source," Tanjug reported that while the US understands Russia's concern, it regards Ahtisaari's plan as the only possible solution to the Kosovo problem and talks are being held on this issue. In fact, Tanjug had inaccurately linked previously issued Department guidance on Kosovo and the Russian position into a U.S. reaction to Lavrov's statement in another example of media inventiveness supporting the GOS party line.

16. (c) Comment: Lavrov's remarks to press would seem to underscore the hardening position outlined reftel. Both the Tadic and Kostunica camps (which are now essentially inseparable on the Kosovo issue) seemed very pleased by the outcome, if unwilling to talk to us about

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it. What the press coverage soft-peddled, though, were Lavrov's comments that Russia had not yet decided whether or not to use its veto, and would only consider the issue once a formal draft UNSCR was introduced. In fact, Lavrov went so far as to say in his RTS interview that Russia had not rejected the "one-sided" Ahtisaari plan, despite having declared the plan a failure in earlier press remarks with Kostunica. Whether this vaguery represents a real opening for compromise or is simply a mild rebuke to Kostunica for trying to box the Russians in with inflammatory rhetoric is an open question we prefer to leave to Embassy Moscow's expert interpretation.

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